



## Tenured Librarians in Large University Libraries

By: Karen Smith, Tamara Frost, Amy Lyons, and **Mary Reichel**

### Abstract

The article is based on a 1979 survey of 530 tenured librarians in thirty three large academic libraries. The professional productivity of the librarians pre- and post-tenure is examined as well as the tenure criteria and evaluation process applied at the time the surveyed librarians received tenure. Comparisons to the situation in 1979 are drawn. The mobility pattern of tenured librarians is also explored

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In 1979, four librarians at State University of New York at Buffalo surveyed tenured librarians at thirty-three large academic libraries. The survey developed because the authors had questions for which they were unable to find answers in the professional literature, such questions as How productive are librarians before and after tenure? What are the most common scholarly and professional activities for librarians? What is the probability of a librarian leaving a tenured position? For what reasons have librarians left tenured positions and under what circumstances would they leave their present tenured positions? What are the criteria and procedures used to award tenure to librarians at universities? Have the criteria and procedures become more stringent over time?

The survey was designed to gather data on the characteristics and accomplishments of tenured librarians. The findings presented here, while primarily descriptive, do provide base data which individuals and library personnel committees can use for comparative purposes.

## METHODOLOGY

In the fall of 1979, postcards were sent to directors of ARL libraries to verify that

their librarians had faculty status and tenure. Thirty-three library directors agreed to participate in the survey, and questionnaires were distributed through those directors to 1,026 tenured librarians.

The response rate varied from library to library, ranging from a low of 24 percent from the University of Colorado to a high of 71 percent from Iowa State University. The largest number of questionnaires from an individual library came from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The complete list of libraries surveyed is given in table 1 along with the number of librarians who responded from each library and the response rate.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF TENURED LIBRARIANS

### Sex

The characteristics of these tenured librarians are not surprising. The breakdown by sex shows 39 percent males and 61 percent females, which agrees with the overall statistics reported for ARL librarians in the annual salary survey for 1979/80.<sup>1</sup> We infer from this that neither sex is granted tenure at a rate disproportionate to its numbers in the total population (see table 2).

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**TABLE 1**  
RESPONSE RATE OF  
LIBRARIANS PARTICIPATING  
IN THE SURVEY

Library	Number of Librarians Responding	Response Rate (Percent)
Alabama	9	60
Arizona	14	40
Cincinnati	7	58
Colorado	5	24
Colorado State	14	61
Florida	15	38
Hawaii	21	43
Houston	7	58
Illinois	48	62
Indiana	30	33
Iowa State	20	71
Kansas	18	55
Kent State	13	57
Kentucky	18	58
Louisiana State	16	43
Miami	11	55
Minnesota	43	58
Ohio State	28	58
Oklahoma State	9	56
Oregon	21	68
Purdue	8	36
Rutgers	25	60
South Carolina	10	53
Southern California	6	40
Southern Illinois	26	67
SUNY-Buffalo	17	53
SUNY-Stony Brook	7	30
Tennessee	15	68
Texas A&M	9	64
Virginia	3	43
Virginia Polytechnic	6	43
Washington State	13	41
Wisconsin	17	57
Total	529	52

Note: One other questionnaire was received with the library identifier obliterated. That questionnaire was used in the tabulations for a total of 530 responses.

## Age

Librarianship is a profession with a significant proportion of older workers. In 1970, for instance, nearly 44 percent of all librarians were age forty-five or more.<sup>2</sup> One would expect tenured librarians to be older than average, and indeed, 54 percent of the librarians responding to this survey in 1979 were age 45 or more.

## Marital Status

Nearly 62 percent of the respondents were married as versus never married, separated, divorced, or widowed. However, only 53 percent had children.

**TABLE 2**  
CHARACTERISTICS OF  
TENURED LIBRARIANS

Characteristics	Number	Percent
<i>Sex</i> (N = 512)		
Female	313	61.1
Male	199	38.9
<i>Age</i> (N = 511)		
28-34	55	10.8
35-44	180	35.2
45-54	143	28.0
55-68	133	26.0
<i>Marital Status</i> (N = 510)		
Married	314	61.6
Other	196	38.4
<i>Children</i> (N = 518)		
None	242	46.7
One or more	276	53.3
<i>Salary</i> (N = 482)		
\$13,000-15,999	36	7.5
\$16,000-20,999	239	49.6
\$21,000-25,999	145	30.1
\$26,000-35,999	50	10.4
\$36,000-48,999	12	2.5
<i>Contract Type</i> (N = 510)		
Academic year	17	3.3
Calendar year	493	96.7
<i>Degrees</i> (N = 522)		
BA	3	.6
MA	8	1.5
MLS/BLS	305	58.4
MLS/BA	135	25.9
MA/MA	2	.4
ABD certificate	11	2.1
PhD	8	1.5
MLS/PhD	37	7.1
Other	13	2.5
<i>Rank</i> (N = 496)		
Level 1 (low)	29	5.8
Level 2	146	29.4
Level 3	235	47.4
Level 4 (high)	86	17.3
<i>Type of work</i> (N = 507)		
Administration	111	21.9
Technical services	106	20.9
Public services	110	21.7
Collection development	90	17.8
Special collections	31	6.1
Documents, AV, maps	27	5.3
Other	32	6.3

Note: Rounding errors account for column totals  $\neq$  100 percent.

## Salary

The salaries of tenured librarians in this 1979 survey were only slightly higher than the figures for all librarians shown in the ARL salary survey for 1979-80.<sup>3</sup> The thirty-three libraries represented in this survey reported a median overall salary just under eighteen thousand dollars while the tenured librarians from those

same libraries had a median salary of twenty thousand dollars. The spread of these two figures is surprisingly narrow. This seems to suggest that having tenure does not noticeably escalate one's salary. Comparable medians for teaching faculty are not available; however, a rough comparison is provided by the fact that associate professors from these institutions were earning an average of \$22,700 that year on academic-year appointments.<sup>4</sup> Very few academic librarians have academic-year contracts. In this survey it was just 3 percent.

### *Degrees*

Most of the tenured librarians in large university libraries have a bachelor's or master's degree in library science. One-third have a second master's or PhD degree in addition to the library degree.

### *Rank*

Librarians at twenty of the thirty-three libraries have professorial titles. Six institutions have numbered librarian ranks (librarian I, II, III) and another six use librarian ranks that have names similar to professorial ranks (i.e., assistant librarian, associate librarian, etc.). One library has no ranks at all. Respondents without professorial titles often volunteered information about the equivalency of their particular rank structure. Sixty-five percent of the tenured librarians are in the top two ranks (levels 3 and 4 in table 2). According to the American Association of University Professors, 30.5 percent of all faculty hold the rank of professor, but among our tenured libraries only 17 percent hold the top rank.<sup>5</sup>

### *Job Titles*

The respondents were quite evenly distributed among the broad areas of administration (22 percent), technical services (21 percent), public services (22 percent), and collection development (18 percent), with the balance being in special collections, documents, audiovisuals, or maps or unclassifiable.

## TENURE

Half of these tenured librarians earned

their library degrees during the 1960s, which was the decade of great expansion for higher education and a time of great shortages in the field of librarianship. However, it was not until after 1971, when the Association of College and Research Libraries adopted the *Standards for Faculty Status for College and University Libraries* that tenure became widely available to academic librarians. Not surprisingly, 75 percent of the librarians in the survey were granted tenure during the decade of the 1970s. Indeed, 30 percent waited eleven to thirty-seven years for tenure.

As table 3 shows, however, the most typical pattern is for librarians to be granted tenure six years after earning their professional library degree, with the average being nine years. At many institutions, tenure and promotion occur simultaneously. However, 30 percent of the librarians reported that they were promoted in rank after tenure was granted and some even received two promotions. The median time between tenure and first promotion in rank was three years. Furthermore, over 40 percent of the librarians said that their professional involvement increased after tenure, while only 8 percent said that it decreased, and over 50 percent of the librarians felt that their job responsibilities increased after tenure. These are all indications that receiving tenure is not the culmination of achievement for academic librarians.

## CRITERIA USED TO GRANT TENURE

In order to determine whether the criteria for tenure had changed over time, the librarians were asked to rank the importance of job performance, research/publications/grants, library/university/community service, contributions to professional associations, and continuing education as criteria for obtaining tenure at the time of their own tenure review and at the time of the survey (see table 4). Space was allowed for entering additional criteria.

Overall, 57.6 percent of the librarians thought that the criteria had changed since they themselves were granted tenure. The percentage was higher (80 per-

**TABLE 3**  
YEARS IN WHICH TENURED LIBRARIANS EARNED THEIR  
LIBRARY DEGREES AND WERE GRANTED TENURE

Year	Number	Percent
<i>Year Library Degree Earned (N=504)</i>		
1934-1955	102	20.2
1956-1960	67	13.3
1961-1965	93	18.5
1966-1970	160	31.7
1971-1979	82	16.3
<i>Year Tenure Granted (N=510)</i>		
1944-1960	18	3.5
1961-1965	35	6.9
1966-1970	75	14.7
1971-1975	210	41.2
1976-1979	172	33.7
<i>Time between Library Degree Earned and Tenure Granted* (N=427)</i>		
1-5 years	89	20.8
6-10 years	209	48.9
11-15 years	68	15.9
16-20 years	36	8.4
21-37 years	25	5.9
Mean = 9 years		
Median = 7 years		
Mode = 6 years		
<i>Time between Tenure Granted and Subsequent Promotion in Rank* (N=158)</i>		
1 year	32	20.2
2-3 years	52	32.9
4-5 years	44	27.8
6-27 years	30	19.0
Mean = 4 years		
Median = 3 years		
Mode = 1 year		

\*Excludes those with previous tenure.

Note: Rounding errors account for column totals  $\neq$  100 percent.

cent) for librarians receiving tenure prior to 1970 and lower (30 percent) for librarians who received tenure between 1976 and 1979. Only three libraries seemed to have maintained stable criteria over a long period of years. For most of the other libraries it was possible to observe a point in time after which the librarians agreed that the criteria did not change. But there were a few libraries that still seemed to be in a state of flux at the time of the survey.

The respondents clearly felt that job performance was, and remained, the single most important criterion in the awarding of tenure. Unlike teaching, which often seems of secondary importance for the teaching faculty in universities, librarianship is the sine qua non for university librarians.

Research and publication was ranked fourth or fifth by 45.5 percent of the respondents for themselves, whereas 58.4 percent ranked it as either first or second

in importance in 1979. Libraries where 50 percent or more of the librarians ranked research and publication high at the time of the survey include Illinois, Ohio State, Oregon, Purdue, SUNY-Buffalo, SUNY-Stony Brook, Texas A&M, and Virginia. Libraries where five or more librarians agreed that research and publication had increased in importance include Houston, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio State, Rutgers, and Southern Illinois.

As for the other criteria, at the time tenure was awarded, librarians felt university and community service was the second most important criterion, with a sizable percentage ranking it as third or fourth. Very few individuals ranked university/community service as either of highest importance or lowest importance, and the importance of university/community service remained about the same in 1979. Professional activity, at the time tenure was awarded and in 1979, was ranked third



**TABLE 4**  
**CRITERIA USED TO GRANT TENURE TO LIBRARIANS**

Factor	Importance as Ranked by the Librarians Surveyed (Percent)				
	1 (High)	2	3	4	5 (Low)
<i>At the Time the Librarian Was Granted Tenure</i>					
Job performance (N=504)	87.1	6.3	3.4	1.2	2.0
Research and publication (N=399)	13.8	21.3	19.5	22.1	23.4
University and community service (N=429)	8.9	45.5	21.0	21.0	3.7
Professional activity (N=408)	4.7	18.9	40.7	26.7	9.1
Continuing education (N=368)	4.1	11.1	15.5	17.1	52.2
<i>At the Time of the Survey (1979)</i>					
Job performance (N=496)	71.0	12.3	8.9	4.6	3.2
Research and publication (N=485)	28.5	29.9	15.9	13.0	12.8
University and community service (N=482)	5.8	34.2	26.6	25.9	7.5
Professional activity (N=474)	3.8	20.9	39.0	27.8	8.4
Continuing education (N=408)	3.7	10.3	10.5	18.1	57.4

Note: Rounding errors account for column totals  $\neq$  100 percent.

most important, while continuing education was least important.

One can conclude that there has been little shifting of importance in the criteria for awarding tenure except in the case of research and publication, which shifted from a fairly even distribution across the scale up to the high end in 1979.

A number of librarians filled in other criteria they felt were important, such as brown-nosing, personality, library politics, teaching, longevity, supervision and management capability, and "not rocking the boat." Several librarians also commented that getting tenure was much less difficult than obtaining a promotion because of the additional salary costs typically involved in promotions.

### REVIEW PROCEDURES

Table 5 shows the review procedures used by the surveyed libraries in granting

tenure and how those procedures have changed over time. There has been a decided increase in the use of librarian peer review in the form of library review committees and votes by the tenured library faculty. This shows that ARL university libraries are beginning to follow the *Standards for Faculty Status for College and University Librarians*, which states, "A peer review system similar to that used by other faculty is the primary basis of judgement in the promotion process for academic librarians."<sup>6</sup> Forty-nine percent of the librarians reported that the process had changed between the time they were granted tenure and 1979.

### PRODUCTIVITY BEFORE AND AFTER TENURE

Librarians were asked to indicate their productivity level for the categories listed in table 6. Space was allotted for listing ad-

**TABLE 5**  
**REVIEW PROCEDURES USED**  
**IN GRANTING TENURE**

Level of Review	Used at Time Librarian Was Granted Tenure (N=526)	Used at Present Time (N=518)
	(Percent)	
Library committee	46.6	74.9
Tenured library faculty	38.0	61.6
Library director	89.5	91.5
University-wide committee	51.1	62.4
University president or academic vice president	61.6	65.1

TABLE 6  
PRODUCTIVITY BEFORE AND AFTER TENURE

Activity	Before Tenure		After Tenure	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<i>Articles Published</i>	(N=446)		(N=447)	
None	226	50.7	241	53.9
One	75	16.8	64	14.3
Two	47	10.5	49	11.0
Three	34	7.6	22	4.9
Four	14	3.1	15	3.4
Five or more	50	10.9	56	12.5
<i>Books Published</i>	(N=450)		(N=453)	
None	397	88.2	380	83.9
One	37	8.2	45	9.9
Two or more	16	3.5	28	6.2
<i>Grants Received</i>	(N=437)		(N=441)	
None	373	85.4	373	84.6
One	41	9.4	44	10.0
Two or more	23	5.2	24	5.4
<i>Paper Presented</i>	(N=414)		(N=435)	
None	274	66.2	246	56.6
One	42	10.1	57	13.1
Two	33	8.0	36	8.3
Three or more	65	15.4	96	21.9
<i>Consultations</i>	(N=422)		(N=428)	
None	355	84.1	319	74.5
One	27	6.4	54	12.6
Two	21	5.0	19	4.4
Three or more	19	4.3	36	8.4
<i>Served on library committees</i>	(N=503)		(N=515)	
	454	90.3	495	96.1
<i>Served on university committees</i>	(N=484)		(N=511)	
	206	42.6	309	60.5
<i>Served on professional committees</i>	(N=499)		(N=515)	
	269	53.9	320	62.1
<i>Held elected office in professional organization</i>	(N=495)		(N=507)	
	186	37.6	216	42.6

Note: Rounding errors account for column totals  $\neq$  100 percent.

ditional professional activities.

There is no significant difference between the productivity levels of these librarians pretenure and posttenure. The mean number of articles published pretenure and posttenure is 2.0 and 1.9 respectively. In the other categories, the mean number of pretenure and posttenure books is 0.2 and 0.3; of grants, 0.2 and 0.2; of papers, 1.4 and 2.0; and for consulting, 0.4 and 0.8. The percentage of librarians serving on library, university, and professional committees, or holding an elected office in a professional organization is higher in all cases after tenure than before.

A number of librarians did list other areas of scholarly activity, such as teaching, editing journals, indexing, book reviewing, translating, and refereeing manuscripts.

Although the amount of publishing of books and articles has remained fairly constant for librarians pretenure and posttenure, the overall output is low. It is particularly so, compared to publication productivity of nonlibrary faculty reported in an article by Lionel S. Lewis.<sup>7</sup> Lewis reports that of faculty granted tenure in 1977 and 1978, only 5.3 percent have not published articles, although 60.5 percent had not published a book. Comparable percentages for librarians granted tenure in 1977 and 1978 are 37.0 not publishing an article and 78.7 not publishing a book. In general, however, the librarians granted tenure in the late 1970s are more prolific authors than their librarian predecessors.

There is some relationship between the level of publishing activity in a library and the importance placed upon research and

publication as a criterion for tenure (chi-square 4.568 significant at .05 with one degree of freedom). Some libraries where the librarians have a good publication record, even though their criteria do not place particular emphasis on research and publication, include Cincinnati, Colorado State, Kentucky, Washington State, and Wisconsin.

### MOBILITY

It is interesting to note that for the fifty-five respondents who left tenured positions in other institutions, the main reason for leaving was advancement, and that comparatively few individuals (only 2.2 percent) were remaining in their tenured positions because they expected job advancement (see table 7). For a large proportion of the librarians surveyed, mobility is restricted by personal and miscellaneous reasons. Personal and miscellaneous reasons were explained by many respondents and included such factors as spouse's job, kids in school, favorable location, restrictions because of specialization, inertia, health reasons, or tuition benefits for children. What is most interesting, however, is that a large proportion of tenured librarians are not totally tied to an institution because of tenure considerations and would leave for personal reasons, advancement, or better salaries—in that order. The responses of married persons to this series of questions did not differ in the slightest from the re-

sponses of unmarried persons. In fact, married persons were somewhat overrepresented in the group of librarians who had actually left tenured positions at other institutions.

### CONCLUSIONS

Our conclusions were summed up nicely in the comment of the librarian who wrote, "For me, tenure was just another hurdle. I set professional goals for myself in the beginning of my career and have accomplished some of them. I have done the things I felt were worthwhile and tenure considerations did not enter into it. I have done nothing different since I obtained tenure."

That a librarian's productivity does not decline with the granting of tenure is evident in the comparison of scholarly activities before and after tenure and in the continued professional involvement and number of promotions received after being granted tenure. Nevertheless, the productivity of librarians in the area of publishing is markedly lower than that of their nonlibrarian faculty colleagues. Although the criteria for awarding tenure have remained largely the same over time for librarians with faculty status, emphasis shifted so that research and publication had become the second most important criterion after job performance by 1979. Likewise, peer review had become decidedly more prominent in the tenure process by 1979, especially review by library

TABLE 7  
MOBILITY OF TENURED LIBRARIANS

Indicator	Number of Librarians	Percent
<i>Held Tenure at Another Institution (N=55)</i>		
Left tenured position for better salary	23	41.8
Left tenured position for advancement	40	72.7
Left tenured position for better working conditions	13	23.6
Left tenured position for personal reasons	25	45.9
<i>Would Leave Present Position (N=498)</i>		
For better salary	212	42.6
For advancement	261	52.4
For better working conditions	176	35.3
For personal reasons	299	60.2
<i>Primary Reason for Staying in Present Position (N=496)</i>		
Advancement opportunities	11	2.2
Near retirement age	46	9.3
Good salary	59	11.9
Pleasant working conditions	169	34.1
Personal and miscellaneous reasons	211	42.5



peers. Having tenure does not appear to be an overriding consideration restricting the mobility and advancement of tenured librarians. Librarians, whether married or not married, are generally tied to their jobs for a variety of personal reasons.

The data gathered in this survey, although conducted in 1979, has not been superseded or contradicted by later re-

search available in the literature. Based also on the experience of the authors, it does not appear that the criteria applied for awarding tenure have changed between 1979 and today. It is, however, the experience of the authors that mobility has been affected by the economic situation of the early 1980s and that librarians may be slightly less mobile today than in 1979.

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